

State Representative
Shirley Hankins

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Transportation
Capital Budget

2004 Legislative Report - 8th District

Dear Neighbors,

It is an honor to serve and represent you in the House of Representatives. Thank you for taking time to contact me during the session to let me know your views on the issues affecting the 8th District.

We adjourned the 2004 legislative session March 11 after spending 60 intense days debating important issues for our district and for the state.

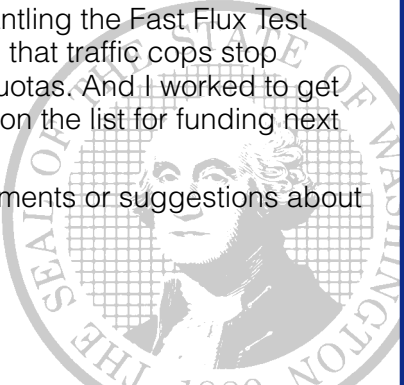
In the supplemental budget, we provided additional money for college enrollments, and pay increases for home health care workers and K-12 non-teaching staff.

The Legislature also spent time carefully considering alternatives to the state's blanket primary, which had been thrown out by the courts.

In addition, I worked on legislation that would prevent dismantling the Fast Flux Test Facility by transferring it to private hands. We tried to make sure that traffic cops stop people because they broke the law and not because of ticket quotas. And I worked to get the proposed Walter Clore Wine and Culinary Center in Prosser on the list for funding next year.

Again, please contact me anytime you have questions, comments or suggestions about state government.

Shirley Hankins
Rep. Shirley Hankins



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Page program offers legislative experience,
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Many thanks to Peter and Rachael Blake, brother and sister from West Richland who served as legislative pages in my Olympia office for one week each. Peter, 16, is a sophomore and Rachael, 14, is a freshman. Both attend Hanford High School in Richland.

Pages duties are varied. They range from ceremonial tasks such as presenting flags to operational chores like delivering messages and documents to legislators in their offices, committee meetings and the House chamber during floor sessions. Pages also spend two hours each day in a classroom setting learning about the legislative process. Plus, they are also paid for the work they do during the week they are in Olympia.

If you are a student who is at least 14 years of age and have not reached your 17th birthday and hold a grade-point average of C+ or better, you might be eligible to become a page in the 2005 legislative session.

For more information and an application, go online to:
<http://www.leg.wa.gov/house/hadm/pageprog.htm>
or contact my office at 360-786-7882.



Rachael Blake



Peter Blake

Major issues of the 2004 session:

Supplemental Operating Budget I voted YES

The supplemental operating budget mostly held the line on spending without increasing taxes while focusing on additional needs of higher education, K-12 education and for the most vulnerable in our state.

The budget includes:

- An additional 3,000 new higher education slots.
- A 50-cent-per hour pay increase for home health care workers.
- A 1 percent cost-of-living pay increase for K-12 classified employees.

Supplemental Capital Budget I voted NO

It is said that when you are in a hole and can't get out, quit digging. That's the concern I had this year with the capital construction budget.

The supplemental capital budget is supposed to address emergencies we did not expect when we passed the original capital budget last year. Yet, this year's construction budget uses the state's operating budget to bond for money to pay for new buildings and projects that are not emergencies. This puts our state deeper into debt. Now is not the right time for this.

These projects should have gotten in line for funding along with other non-emergency projects that will wait for next year, such as the WSU Richland campus science building and the Walter Clore Wine and Culinary Center. As a member of the Capital Budget Committee, I worked to get these two local projects on the top of the list to be addressed when the Legislature meets next year. That will be the appropriate time to address non-emergent needs.

Replacing the blanket primary I voted NO

When the courts threw out Washington's blanket primary election system after the state's political parties sued, the Legislature came up with a new system – the Top 2. This would advance the top two vote-getters for each office on to the general election, regardless of party.

Unfortunately, the Legislature also added a backup plan endorsed by the parties called the "Montana Plan." This would have voters privately pick a single party's ballot in September and choose only among that party's candidates.

I believe the primary election should be for the PEOPLE, not the PARTY. That's why I voted no.

When the bill reached the governor's desk, he did what most of us expected. He vetoed the Top 2, leaving the Montana Plan as our primary election system for this fall.

Buying prescription drugs in Canada ... I voted YES

The House approved a bill authorizing state agencies to buy prescription drugs from Canadian pharmacies to save money. The bill would have also helped individual consumers buy Canadian.

Many people in our state are having a hard time affording their prescription drugs. Anything we can do to make it easier for them is what I support. So I voted yes on this bill. Unfortunately, it died in the Senate. It's my hope that we can continue working to ensure access to affordable prescription drugs.

Senior citizen property tax relief I voted YES

Low-income seniors not only have to worry about affording their prescription drugs, they also have the burden of affording increasingly high property taxes each year.

This year, I supported legislation that increases the maximum income eligibility for seniors and retired disabled people to receive exemptions from a portion of their property tax bills. The measure adds at least \$5,000 to each of the three income thresholds for which some level of property tax relief is available. It also allows seniors to deduct Medicare insurance premiums from disposable income counted under the threshold.

Research and development tax breaks ... I voted YES

The Legislature renewed two tax breaks for high-tech research and development. This will especially benefit our local research and development industry which provides high-wage jobs. Hopefully, it will also help to attract more R&D companies to the Tri-Cities.



Gov. Gary Locke visits with Rep. Shirley Hankins during a break on the House floor.

Small business health insurance I voted YES

Businesses have struggled with health insurance premiums as high as 30 percent a year. To help them to continue offering affordable health care coverage for their employees, the Legislature passed and I supported a small business health insurance bill. The measure allows businesses with 50 or fewer employees to offer a no-frills health benefit plan for workers.

Privatizing FFTF I voted YES

I co-sponsored a House Joint Memorial urging Congress to save the Fast Flux Test Facility at Hanford and put it into private hands so it can produce life-saving medical isotopes and conduct energy-related research. The FFTF is an extremely important tool to fight cancer and it also holds substantial value as an educational and research tool. The measure passed the House. Unfortunately, it died in a Senate committee.

Local public works projects I voted YES

I co-sponsored and supported a bill approved by the Legislature which provides low- or no-interest loans to 79 public works projects including three in our local area. The bill approves \$3.25 million for acquisition of right-of-way and money for construction of a two-lane roadway in Benton County linking I-82 with State Route 397. It also provides money for construction of Keene Road in West Richland and nearly \$4.5 million for a domestic water project, also in West Richland.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Tort Reform - Most disappointing was the failure of the Legislature to reach agreement on tort reform. A sweeping package placing limits on lawsuits and caps on non-economic damages passed the Senate, but died in the House. I am most concerned that we will lose doctors because of this crisis as well as health services for women. Limits are fine, but we also need to hold insurance companies, lawyers and the judicial system accountable for such high costs.

Ticket quotas - If you are stopped by a traffic officer, it should be because he has reason to believe you broke the law, not because he has a certain amount of tickets he's expected to write that day. I prime-sponsored legislation outlawing ticket quotas. The chair of the House Criminal Justice and Corrections Committee wouldn't give the bill a hearing. I will continue working on this issue next year.